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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses responses to a survey paralleling a national study of trustees in North Carolina. Conducted in 1968, the survey was aimed at 1600 trustees; some 800 responded. The remarks deal principally with findings of importance to the trustees themselves, and answered 4 general questions: (1) who are North Carolina's trustees; (2) how prepared are they for the trusteeship; (3) what are their views toward constituents of their campuses; and (4) how do they operate. The first question covers characteristics such as age, race, education, religion, occupation, and political views. The second used indicators of preparedness such as familiarity with relevant reading material and participation in campus activities. The third documented attitudes toward students, faculty and administrators. How trustees operate was explored by selecting issues and asking respondents whether they should decide, review and advise on, or approve and confirm them. (JS)

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The Trustee in North Carolina*

J. A. Davis

Educational Testing Service

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
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Being a college student (or so our current generation tells us) qualifies one as an expert on what is wrong (if not what is right) with our institutions of higher education, and consequently with the changes--from the top down--that need to be made. Anyone who has been a faculty member is an empiricist in these problems, and an ever-ready authority on a vast range of governmental matters affecting (or afflicting) him in his professional and private life. Anyone who has been a college administrator has been forced, by position, to play a role sometimes on the side of faculty and students and sometimes on the side of the president and trustees; he thus can speak with the open vision that comes from living on all sides at once. Anyone who has read a book or paper on governance--or a press release from a Board of Trustees in one of the currently frequent crisis situations--is a scholar. Anyone who has attempted to write a serious paper on higher education is an intellectual. But beyond all these qualifications--one who receives an invitation to speak to such an august and powerful body as that here assembled can feel that in that commission he has a kind of divine revelation into his own infinite wisdom and astuteness in the conduct of university affairs.

I have played or am playing all of these roles. And, though their number could, according to a certain Dr. Peter, imply, rather than expertise, that I can't hold any job for very long, we all need at the outset to perceive the possible hazard in taking anything I say very seriously.

There is, however, one other hazard you and I must cope with in any remarks I make to you today; that lies in the commission I received from the Board of Higher Education, on behalf of our research office of Educational Testing Service in Durham, to conduct a formal survey of all trustees of institutions of higher education in North Carolina. For that survey was conducted, and I am now armed with what Disraeli called, as one item in a series, "statistics."

As for the survey of North Carolina trustees, you have been provided, I am told, with one brief summary account that tells something of what we did and what we found. That survey, paralleling a national study, was aimed at some 1600 trustees in North Carolina in the spring of 1968; some 800 actually responded; the questions dealt with who the trustees are, the nature of their service to their college or university, and where they stand on a number of crucial and current issues facing higher education.

The findings may have implications for a variety of targets: those who select trustees; those concerned with their care and feeding, such as the president of the university; or those, such as Dr. Fisher here, who are playing a potential architect's role in redesigning, or a decorator's role in highlighting, the best features of promise of the governing board. I should like, however, to confine my observations here principally to those survey data that have implications for the trustee himself. These observations fall, I feel, into four general areas:

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1. Who are you? What seem to be your particular capabilities and limitations? What are the kinds of expertise you can expect from compatriots on your own board or on other boards?

2. How ready are you for the trusteeship? What kinds of information and activity could facilitate your understanding of the college and your performance as a governing agent?

3. What view do you take of the constituent human elements of your college or university--the president, administration, faculty, students?

4. How do you, as trustees, operate? What forces may have contributed to your modus operandi? Is this what you want, what should be?

Who Are You?

Who are you? If the some 800 trustees in North Carolina responding are a representative sample, you are male (88%) and mature (7% below 40 years of age, and one third 60 or over); if you represent a traditionally white institution or a community college you are white. If you are black, you represent a traditionally Negro college, and one half of your compatriots on similar boards are white. You are fairly well educated; over all, 80% of you have at least a baccalaureate degree. But, more significant, you vary sharply in educational level as a function of the kind of institution you serve: for example, one out of every four trustees in the Public-Senior-White institutions holds a masters or higher degree, while three out of every four in the Private-Senior-Negro institutions hold a masters or higher. As for religious affiliation, we have plenty of Methodists, Presbyterians, and Baptists among us, but few (3%) Catholics or Jews. In income, you vary by type of institution served, but in general have a median annual income around $25,000 with 20% earning $50,000 or more.

By occupation, in the public white institutions the largest group are business executives (about half), while in the private white institutions this category contains about one third of the trustees. Almost one fourth in the private junior or senior college group are clergy; if you open your board meetings with prayer in the public white institutions, you probably call in the college chaplain. Law and medicine are fairly well represented on the public college boards. Hardly visible or absent in our statistics are such professional people as architects, engineers, researchers, professional educators at any level, public administrators, and authors or journalists (although there are some interesting variations in these "minority" professions when trustees are considered by type of institution they serve).

In political party affiliation, the total trustees responding, and those in the community college group, parallel almost exactly the voter registration figures for North Carolina at the time of the survey. But more than 90% of the senior public trustees, against about two thirds of the private, report they are Democrats. Had the trustees responding in North Carolina controlled the national presidential election and had it been held at that time, though, Mr. Nixon would be in office; Mr. Rockefeller came in second, Eugene McCarthy third, then Johnson, then Reagan.* There were strong differences by institutional type, color, and control. In political ideology, one fifth considered themselves conservative, two thirds moderate, and one tenth liberal.

*It should be noted that the questions from which this sweeping generalization is drawn asked not for whom the trustee would vote, but rather whether he tended to "agree with the views" of the various political figures.

Thus, this observer can probably speculate safely that the business affairs of the college or university are in good hands, and verify a variety of occupations represented on the boards. But: considering the total economy and high-level manpower needs of the state, where do you seem vulnerable? What other kinds of expertise do you consider relevant to your task--and where and how will you obtain it? Or: are you indeed businessmen, visibly successful, augmented somewhat by lawyers, doctors, and ministers, who are concerned with rather specifically the business affairs and long-range planning and little else as long as students and faculty behave themselves, and your president doesn't resign?

How Ready Are You for the Trusteeship?

The second question I have posed of the survey data today is: Are you ready for the trusteeship? Some of today's faculty or students would take issue with your stands or attitudes on educational issues, or convictions, but this you know already.

Rather, we might get better evidence on readiness for the trusteeship from the options the survey questionnaire provided from three kinds of inquiry: (1) what previous or current experience do you have on other governmental boards; (2) how familiar are you with the most competent opinion about university governance; and (3) what opportunities have you enjoyed for knowing or getting to know your campus at first hand?

In our North Carolina sample (as elsewhere in the nation, according to the parallel national survey), the great majority--some eighty percent--are serving on a college or university trustee board for the first time, and 90 percent were serving on only one board at the time of the survey. In present service, however, some 60 percent of the North Carolina respondents have served four years or more.

In other governmental, directorship, or high-level management experience, 13 percent have served in the last five years on boards of corporations whose shares are traded on a stock exchange, and 10 percent are executives of such corporations. On other governing bodies such as boards of education, or church or community affairs boards, trustees appear well-seasoned: only 4% of those responding reported no such service in the last five years, and more than a third reported serving on five or more such boards.

The survey questionnaire also asked respondents their degree of familiarity with fifteen "classics" in the recent literature on governance or the trusteeship (e.g., Ruml and Morrison's Memo to a College Trustee, or Kerr's The Uses of the University); also, it asked for report of familiarity with or frequency of reading of eleven periodicals such as the Association of Governing Boards' AGB Reports. Half or more of the North Carolina trustees reported, book by book, that they had never heard of it (though the national sample did no better), and in most cases less than ten percent reported having read the given book completely or partially. A similar picture is obtained from the report of knowledge or frequency of reading the eleven selections from the periodical literature, with the best record set for the EPE 15-Minute Newsletter, which ten percent reported reading regularly.

No one--least of all the trustee himself--needs to state that the trustee is a busy man, with less time or reason for reading than students and faculty. But: would you be interested in leads on relevant bibliographic resources? How can you get effective access to these, if indeed you are interested? Whatever your convictions on this, you could get out-documented rather quickly in any running debate with the people your governance affects. One implication would be to take, as a first step, a careful look at the products of the Board of Higher Education's commission to Ben Fisher.

The third questionnaire area postulated as relevant to our question of readiness of the trustee for his role is: what opportunities have trustees had for first-hand acquaintance with their campus? A possible flaw in this approach, for our purposes, is the prior question of what kinds of personal contact or experience outside the board room are necessary or even appropriate. If you will keep this qualification in mind, I can more safely report the relevant findings.

First, we found that about one fourth of all North Carolina respondents have one or more earned degrees from the institution they now serve. This proportion rises to almost fifty percent for the trustees in the public-senior-white category. A fair proportion know at least the "good old days" when Bob House played a harmonica at student assemblies, or when Dr. Jackson rocked on his front porch in Greensboro in the late afternoon.

The survey also asked several questions about time spent, as a trustee, in several on-campus activities outside of regular board meetings or committee activity. More than eighty percent reported less than twenty hours per year in ad hoc meetings of college groups or in personal conferences with college personnel. As was found for the national sample of trustees, the board meetings, or board committee activities, consume the majority of time the trustee relegates to his college or university service. Major attention at these meetings is devoted to fiscal matters, building plans, and long range projections. The questions for you, as trustees, to consider are: do I have anything to gain from some current contact with the campus beyond what I receive, second-hand, from the president? If so, what are proper and appropriate occasions, and how may they be set up? (I ask this question because I feel that my alma mater today is different from what it was in 1940, and because I get three different impressions of it today from (1) what I read in the press generally; (2) what I infer from press reports of formal board actions; and (3) what I see and feel when I slip into an AAUP chapter meeting, or see one of our faculty greats in action at the Glenwood School PTA--or for that matter, pick up a hitchhiking political science major headed for a Greensboro week end.)

What View Do You Take of the Human Components of Your Institution?

Our third question--"what views do you take of the students, faculty, and others at your institution?"--is most difficult to summarize adequately in the time available here. This is unfortunate, for some of the most significant, yet complex findings probably lie in this part of the data. Those interested should seek out the complete formal report.

With regard to the president, the questionnaire data is sufficiently clear and unequivocal that I'm sure I need not waste your time in documenting that you know, respect, and take him seriously. Probably the greatest unanimity achieved among respondents had to do with trustee responsibility for choice of president, and a sane and reasonable view of his role as your chief executive.

The faculties will probably be gratified to learn that you agree with them, in general, that many matters such as grading policy or curriculum decisions are not trustee but faculty and administrative prerogatives, or that students should be involved in policy concerning discipline for cheating. On the other hand, in their characteristic fashion, faculty may raise angry cries if they learn that less than seven percent of one North Carolina sample of trustees felt the faculty should be involved in <u>any</u> direct way--in concert with administrators and/or trustees--in the choice of a college president, or that almost two-thirds of the total sample of trustees feel a loyalty oath for a professor

is reasonable, or that one fourth of the trustees responding disagree that the faculty should have the right to express opinions on any issue. Similarly, you can guess what some factions of our student bodies would say if they knew that almost two thirds of the trustees feel that the college should also discipline students already punished for off-campus civil disobedience (as opposed to on-campus civil disobedience), or that more than three fourths favor official screening of campus speakers (ground we know well in North Carolina), or that almost half favor administrator control of content of student newspapers.

You cannot, of course, unless I were one of you and well-known for moderate viewpoints on all things, trust my selection here of areas to report with some specificity. From the sharp division of opinion among trustees on many of these issues, I doubt that you could trust me even if I were a reputable peer. Nevertheless, after sifting and resifting the data, and after trying in good conscience for as clean an empathy with you as possible, I feel a strong and pervasive in loco parentis attitude toward students, and at the very least some suspicion of the faculty and their Groves of Academe motives, or perhaps just a simple absence of good knowledge or concern as to what the great majority of faculty believe or why they feel that way.

The purpose of this conference, of course, is definitely not to hold a moratorium or a wake on the trusteeship, but rather to press throughout for the most effective leads as to how the critical and important function of the trustee may best be exercised. It would seem prudent, I believe, for any trustee to take a careful and first hand look at the students, faculty, and administrators beyond the president (otherwise, as with students at Columbia University, they may come face-to-face with them in court), and seek some informed feel for where and why students or faculty take such opposite points of view from those of the trustee--whether the purpose is to find an acceptable consensus, or is to set forces in motion which may help the "other side" understand more adequately why a disagreement exists. (Lest any feel we've been unfair to trustees here, we should all pause for a second to recognize that in any serious group of trustees, faculty, or students we can have all conceivable shades of opinion about anything; these different shades can be strongly held and, generally, capably defended.)

How Do You Operate?

Our final question is: how do you, as trustees, operate? Our survey attempted to get at this by taking a selection of kinds of problems, or areas for policy decisions, and asking respondents whether they felt trustees should decide, review and advise, or approve and confirm. We also tried to determine the kinds of topics that occupy time at board or committee meetings.

Given the subtleties of what, in a situation short of crisis, you may actually do or be asked to do, it would seem foolish to use the questionnaire data to try to answer this. Yet--on my own part and on the part of a number of reviewers of the data (whom I have promised shall be nameless)--there is an inescapable uneasiness--(or, in some cases, relief) that trustees are, for most of the routine business of the college or university, a docile and cooperative group ready to aid the president by (in effect) asking what action he needs, on whatever matters he chooses to bring to their attention (unless something rather dramatic attracting public attention has erupted). This statement, I must confess, is purposefully extreme, but it raises the largest and most critical question of all: What is the proper role of the trustee?

A case can be made, from logic, legal bases, and the complete survey data, that the trustee should be and is a director of the corporation, is and should be the university. But also, a case can be made that, principally due to his apparent unreadiness, customary mode of service, protective coating, or the complexity of job and scarcity of time for it, he must be a rubber stamp in situations short of the court of last resort situation. Some full-time professional educators and students--certainly many faculty and perhaps some presidents--may prefer it that way, feeling it easier to prompt than to assist and instruct.

But, whatever the point of view or your personal stand at this beginning point in the Governor's conference: you the trustee must share actively and thoughtfully in the definition of the trusteeship. It is your board, your trusteeship. The decisions you and your board colleagues make will affect who is trained for the high-level manpower needs of the state and our society, and the quality of that training. The stakes include the contribution and the conscience of a generation of students.